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ABSTRACT

For every 100 Mexican Americans who enter elementary school, only 22.5 make it to college. Of these 22.5, only 5.4 graduate. The situation appears as bleak in the area of graduate studies. However, Chicano or Mexican American oriented groups at universities in the Southwest, often aided by outside groups, have been pushing for institutional changes to increase their enrollment and retention rates. This demand for rapid institutional changes is based on the assumption that "evolutionary" change will not result in a significant narrowing of the educational gap between Chicanos and Anglos. Universities faced with shrinking revenues, decreasing enrollments, and more direct control from legislators and trustees due to public pressure, have found it more and more difficult to comply with the demands. However, efforts are being made--feeble in some institutions, strong in others--to increase the number of Chicano students. Courses which did not exist before are being offered; financial aid is being dispensed; and some supportive services have been established. Focusing on the problematic situation and the university's response to that challenge, this paper discusses the administration's philosophical orientation, admission-related activities (criteria, recruitment, orientation), financial aid, supportive services (counseling, advising, tutoring), and academic and non-academic activities. (NQ)

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Universities and the Chicano Student:

An Assessment*

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Universities and the Chicano Student:

An Assessment

Introduction

Mexican Americans constitute the second largest minority group in the United States, numbering over six million, and they are the largest such group in the five southwestern states: New Mexico (40% of the population), Arizona (19%), Texas (18%), California (16%), and Colorado (13%). For the whole Southwest, Mexican Americans also represented 17% of the college-age population in 1970, and predictions are that their population will increase to 23% by 1980.[1]

One of the functions of institutions of higher education is to prepare individuals to obtain better jobs. The data strongly suggest, however, that universities in the Southwest seem not to have been performing adequately for Mexican Americans. Whereas Mexican Americans constituted 14.2% of the labor force in the Southwest in 1970, they comprised only 7.3% of the Professional, Technical, and Kindred category of occupations.[2] The discussion that follows is organized around two themes: (1) the problematic situation; and (2) the university's response to that challenge.

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[1] Richard I. Ferrin, Richard W. Jonsen, Cesar M. Trimble, Access to College for Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Higher Education Surveys. Report No. 6 (College Entrance Examination Board, 1972).

[2] U.S. Census, 1970.

1. The Problematic Situation.

The problem that Chicanos face in higher education has deep roots in the public schools system; somehow the schools do not prepare them adequately and do not motivate many to go to college. Thus, for every 100 Mexican Americans who enter elementary school, only 22.5 make it to college. This is a lower ratio than for Anglos or Blacks. (Of the former, 49.3 make it to college; of the latter, 23.8 do so.) Moreover, the survival rate for Chicanos in college is very low. Of the 22.5 who go to college, only 5.4 graduate (24%). (Percentages for Anglos and Blacks are 48% and 35% respectively.[1]

The situation appears as bleak in the area of graduate studies. In 1970, Chicanos represented approximately 0.5% of all full and part-time graduate students in the USA.[2] The number of Mexican Americans with Master's and Ph.D. degrees is so small that it creates staffing problems at public schools and universities. Knowlton cites a case in El Paso, Texas, in 1968. Although over 60% of the school enrollment was Mexican American, the school system had only two Mexican American counselors, two Mexican American principals, and very few Mexican American office personnel.[3] Recruiting a sufficient number of "qualified" Mexican Americans for teaching positions at universities has been even more problematic. Samora estimated the number

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[1]U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The Unfinished Education: Outcomes for Minorities in the Five Southwestern States. Mexican American Education Study, Report II (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971).

[2]Rodolfo O. de la Garza, "A Chicano View of Graduate Education: Where We are and Where We Should Be," paper presented at the Council of Graduate Schools Annual Meeting, Phoenix, Arizona, Dec 5, 1974.

[3]Clark S. Knowlton, "The Special Education Problems of the Mexican Americans," in Sterling M. McMurrin, The Conditions for Educational Equality (N.Y.: Committee for Economic Development, 1971), p. 170.

of Mexican American Ph.D.'s in 1970 to be only about 100.[1] Similarly, Chicanos are underrepresented in other professional fields. It has been estimated that as of 1970, 1.4% of all lawyers and judges in the USA were Spanish-surnamed; as were 2.3% of the life and physical scientists; and 2.2% of the engineers.[2] Allowing for the brain drain from Latin America to the USA and the recent influx of Cubans, it is perhaps safe to say that Mexican Americans constitute no more than 1% of the professional population.[3]

As evidenced by their continued activism, Chicano or Mexican American oriented groups[4] at universities in the Southwest, often aided by outside groups, have followed the example set by Blacks in the 1960's and have been pushing for institutional changes to increase their enrollment and retention rates in universities. This is an immense task for colleges and universities. To obtain proportional representation for Mexican Americans, they would have to increase their enrollment by 330%.[5] Consequently, given continuing demands by Chicanos for "equality of opportunity" in gaining admission to universities and for graduating from them, the situation promises to become increasingly more difficult for universities to deal with and hence, increasingly more controversial.

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[1] The National Elementary Principal, L, No. 2, 1970, pp. 98-101.

[2] Rodolfo O. de la Garza, op. cit.

[3] Ibid.

[4] The terms Chicano and Mexican Americans are used interchangeably.

[5] Fred E. Crossland, Minority Access to College (New York: Schocken Books, 1971, p. 16.

Chicanos, for example, have been demanding rapid institutional changes based on the assumption that "evolutionary" change in the public schools or in the universities will not result in a significant narrowing of the educational gap between Chicanos and Anglos. Universities, faced with shrinking revenues, decreasing enrollments, and more direct control from legislators and trustees due to public pressure, have found it more and more difficult to comply with the demands made by Chicano groups.

The demands most often made by Chicanos are the following:

a. Changes, or greater flexibility, in the use of traditional college admission criteria, both at the undergraduate and graduate or professional levels.

b. Changes in financial assistance programs, both in the amount of money available for aid, and in the procedures for dispensing such assistance.

c. An expansion and refocusing of the orientation-counseling-advising services to better meet the needs of the Mexican American poor.

d. A modification of academic programs making provisions for remedial courses in mathematics and the hard sciences; the introduction of courses to prepare Chicano students for occupations related to the needs of the Mexican American communities; and a curriculum designed to contribute to the development of the Chicano pride in his ethnic heritage.

e. The support of ethnic-oriented social and cultural activities on campus so as to create a suitable environment which aids in the retention of Chicano students.

2. The University's Response to the Challenge.

The issue of whether or not there should be programs specially designed for Chicanos, nay, for minority students in general, is embedded in a sea of

controversy--differences in educational philosophy, in conceptions of what is right, just, and desirable in education. In general, colleges and universities in the Southwest have responded in a variety of ways to the challenges posed above and to the pressures for institutional change. Prior to 1967, less than 10 "programs" existed which made special efforts to educate Mexican Americans. However by 1972, the number of such programs had expanded to between 100 and 150.[1] There tends to be tremendous variation among these "programs." Some universities offer only a few courses related to Chicanos; others offer a larger number of courses in a concentration in Chicano Studies; still others have organized departments of Chicano Studies. Although most of these programs are housed in the humanities and social sciences, a few are found in the hard sciences. Changes have been instituted pertaining to financial aid, counseling services, orientation activities, admission criteria and procedures, and in non-academic activities, but the controversy about programs lingers on.

It is assumed that the educational philosophy of university administration with respect to the issue of special programs for minority students is very important in determining the nature of such programs. This will be discussed below before getting into more specific aspects of programs such as admission-related activities, financial aid, and others.

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[1]As quoted in Winnie Bengelsdorf, Ethnic Studies in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1972), p. 20. (Information furnished by Mr. Franco Alejandro, from the National Concilio for Chicano Studies, Washington, D.C.).

a. Philosophical orientation of administration

It has been said that the organization of university programs for minority students has been more a result of administration's "panic and consternation" in the face of "conflict and confrontation" by students and some faculty, rather than the result of administration's understanding of, conviction about, and commitment to the education of minorities.[1] If such is the case, one might expect makeshift policy, rather than firm commitments in relation to the education of minorities. On the issue of commitment, one college president of an institution in the Southwest, who recently attended a meeting to which college presidents had been invited, put it this way:

> "...The absence of my colleagues simply illustrates the problems Mexican Americans face in getting a fair chance in the system. Those in positions to make decisions that would bring about change refuse to become personally informed and concerned. They typically delegate their minority staff representative to come to these things, but when he returns he naturally has to compete with a host of others for the President's attention. And that is never as effective as when the President gets the word first hand."[2]

How do universities in the Southwest perceive this problem? According to a survey conducted in 1970 among college and university presidents and

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[1] See: Phyllis W. Watts, "Introduction" in Graduate Education and Ethnic Minorities (Boulder: Western Association of Graduate Schools and Western Interstate Commission, 1970), p. 4.

Julian Samora and Ernesto Galarza, "Research and Scholarly Activity," EPOCA, (The National Concilio for Chicano Studies Journal), I, No. 2, (1971), p. 51.

W. John Minter and Patricia O. Snyder (eds.), Value Change and Power Conflict. (Berkeley: Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, 1969).

Frederick S. Edelstein, "The Politics of Ethnic Studies in Higher Education: A Case Study of the Establishment of Ethnic Studies Programs at Four Big Eight Universities," unpublished dissertation, University of Neb, 1973.

[2] Ferrin et. al., op. cit., p. 1.

administrators from five southwestern states, 75% of the administrators in two of those states considered that there was no need for Chicano Studies programs at their universities.[1]

A number of authors, primarily members of minority groups, have addressed themselves in general terms to the philosophical orientation that should guide ethnic oriented programs. There is, however, little clearcut discussion, and less agreement, addressing specifically the question of the desirability of establishing special programs for minority students as opposed to strengthening regular programs to better serve these and other students.

b. Admission-related activities: criteria, recruitment, orientation

Given the conditions that prevail, in general, for Mexican Americans within the public school system, the likelihood that Mexican Americans will be prepared to meet traditional college entrance requirements is small.[2] Changes in such requirements have been recommended as a measure of justice to make it possible for larger numbers of students to enroll. However, these recommendations bring forth a great deal of opposition in academic circles on

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[1]Corinne J. Sanchez, "A Challenge for Colleges and Universities: Chicano Studies," Civil Rights Digest, III, 4 (Fall, 1970), 36-39.

[2]See for example, Carter, Thomas P., Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect (N.Y., College Entrance Examination Board, 1970). Knowlton, op. cit.

See also U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Ethnic Isolation of Mexican Americans in the Schools of the Southwest. Mexican American Education Study, Report I (Washington, D.C.,: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971); The Unfinished Education, Report II (1971); The Excluded Student: Educational Practices Affecting Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Report III (1972); Mexican American Education in Texas: A Function of Wealth. Report IV (1972); Teachers and Students: Differences in Teacher Interaction with Mexican American and Anglo Students. Report V (1973); Toward Quality Education for Mexican Americans. Report VI (1974).

the grounds that they will result in an over-all lowering of academic standards and the "quality" of education. Others see no relationship between broadening admissions criteria and lowering the quality of education; it is claimed that broadening admissions criteria means, in essence, removing barriers to the disadvantaged, and not relaxing standards for graduation.

The subject of admissions criteria at universities is very polemical. Various educators point out that for beginning college students strict adherence to criteria such as high scores in S.A.T. or A.C.T. tests, or high rank in a high school graduating class, will have very negative effects on minority enrollment. Some educators also suggest the broadening of admissions criteria, stressing, for example, the student's potential as evidenced by recommendations from high school principals, civic leaders, church leaders, and personal interviews with the prospective student. The situation is equally as controversial with respect to graduate studies admissions criteria and the emphasis on GRE scores and college GPA.[1] But hard data are scarce on what universities do with admissions criteria and what effect this has on minority enrollment.

Survey data point out the three approaches used most by public 4-year colleges to recruit or attract Mexican Americans to their undergraduate programs. These are making special visits to schools enrolling large numbers of Mexican Americans (55% of the colleges); using Mexican American staff recruiters (36%); making specific requests to high school counselors. Other approaches used to a lesser extent are the following: using Mexican American student recruiters (29%); contacting Mexican American community agencies (27%); and making special efforts to talk with parents of Mexican American students

[1] See De la Garza, op. cit.

(20%).[1] Other approaches have been recommended such as sounding out the Catholic Church for names of promising students, going to community colleges in search of promising "transfers," and extending search programs into the 9th grade. The extent to which these have been used and their effectiveness is not known.

To provide special orientation programs to minority students who may be high risks in the university milieu, some universities bring these students to campus during the summer prior to fall enrollment for intensive orientation and basic skills training. Courses in reading, mathematics, study habits, English fundamentals, and some principles of psychology and sociology related to personal adaptation to university life are often included in orientation programs. Suggestions have been made for additional shorter advising sessions during the summer and immediately before the registration period.[2] However, what is actually being done, how it is done, and with what results are questions which are not answered in the literature available.

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[1]Ferrin et. al., op. cit., p. 23.

[2]Frank Ganizales, "Orientation and Counseling Service for Minority Students," in R.A. Altman and P.O. Snyder (eds.), The Minority Student on Campus: Expectations and Possibilities, (Boulder, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education), pp. 141-147.

c. Financial Aid

The low-income level of Mexican Americans is a major barrier to college attendance; over-all earnings of the Spanish-surnamed in the Southwest was only 76.4% of that of Anglos in 1969. The evidence available points out the importance of financial aid in the education of Mexican Americans at colleges and universities.

> "...when I get back [a member of the Board of Trustees of a State college in the Southwest] I am going to take another look at our financial aid office. From what I have heard today, the staff in financial aid offices probably have more impact on whether or not a Mexican American kid enrolls in college than anyone else at our institution.[1]

In a survey conducted for the College Entrance Examination Board among financial aid offices in the Southwest, "family economic needs" was the item most mentioned (64%) as limiting the enrollment of Mexican Americans.[2] Data from the same survey points out that in 1970-71 Mexican American students attending public 4-year and private colleges received financial aid that, on the average, met roughly only 25% of estimated college costs.[3]

The aid that is given Mexican Americans may take the form of grants, scholarship, loans, and work study. The amount of aid available and the criteria used in its distribution are items of great concern. Yet, what is being done and with what results are matters on which hard data are scarce.

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[1] College Entrance Examination Board, Access to College for Mexican Americans in the Southwest: Report of Action Conference. (Austin, College Entrance Examination Board, 1972), p. 1.

[2] Ferrin et.al., op. cit., p. 9.

[3] Ibid.

d. Supportive Services (counseling, advising, tutoring)

Chicanos who finish high school are more likely than Anglos to have disabilities in certain skills which are related to survival in college, e.g., reading and writing skills. For example, 63% of Chicano high school graduates read below their grade level, as compared to 34% of the Anglos.[1]

The literature cites problems that the Chicano student faces when he comes to the university: financial hardships because of his family's low income; social-psychological problems associated with ethnic identity and cultural loyalty, and in moving from his familiar, usually lower-class background to a middle class one; academic problems such as deficiencies in reading, writing, and note-taking skills; and problems that most students face in designing a meaningful academic program which will lead to a satisfying occupation.[2] The literature points out the desirability of special counselors, hopefully of minority background, and also points to the need for sound academic advice on courses related to specific careers. But no published information is found on the characteristics--personal and professional--of counselors and advisors, nor about the process of counseling and advising of Chicano students.

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[1]U.S. Civil Rights Commission, The Unfinished Education. See also Crossland, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

[2]See Guerra, Manuel, "The Retention of Mexican American Students," in Johnson, Henry Sioux and William J. Hernandez, Educating the Mexican American (Valley Forge, Pa. Judson Press, 1970, pp. 136-137.

e. Academic Activities

Remedial-type courses have been offered in English, Mathematics, and some of the hard sciences. But there is information that some students who presumably need them are "turned off" by such courses perceiving them as "demeaning" in nature.

It is common knowledge that ethnic-oriented courses, hopefully aimed at bolstering pride in ethnic heritage, are being offered in most colleges and universities, but providing ethnic courses with minority students as one of their targets is irrelevant if such students don't enroll in them. There is information about ethnic-related courses available, where they are offered, the names of those who teach them, and Chicano student enrollment in them.[1] There is no information available, to our knowledge, about the orientations of such courses, the characteristics of persons who teach them, the type of Chicano student who takes them, and what effects those courses have on those who take them.

f. Non-Academic Activities

The usually Anglo, middle class social environment seems not to be the most congenial for the struggling lower class minority student. The importance of non-curricular activities--the so-called campus culture--in the general education of college students has been pointed out before.[2] To a minority student, particularly to a lower class minority student as is generally the case, the culture of the campus may not be the most congenial social environment. This factor may be at least as important as the curriculum in determining the retention rate of students of minority background. Not only must

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[1] See Bengelsdorf, op. cit., p. 118 on survey data collected on Chicano Studies in the Southwest.

[2] Terry F. Lunsford (ed.), The Study of Campus Cultures: The Papers Presented at the Fifth Annual Institute on College Self Study (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1963).

the minority student deal with a campus environment which did not develop to suit his needs, but he may also have to deal with an off-campus community environment which is not very receptive to his presence.[1]

No published studies have been located dealing with the Chicano student's participation in Chicano-related campus organizations nor with community organizations.[2]

CONCLUSION

If one compares the universities of the Southwest with what they were for the Mexican American before the turbulent years of the 1960's, one might be tempted to say that progress has been made: there is more awareness of past injustices, and efforts are being made--feeble in some institutions, strong in others--to increase the number of Chicano students; courses which did not exist before are being offered; financial aid--small or large--is being dispensed; and some supportive services have been established. One is less sure about the accuracy of these impressions of progress. For the large universe of colleges and universities in the Southwest, systematic data are scarce on what has been done and its effects on the Mexican American. One is constantly being hit by conflicting pieces of data--tightening of admission standards here, a loosening of them there, the creation of change on paper with the hope that the paper may come to life by itself, only to end in disillusion, the rise and fall of committed individuals, the loosening of rigid structures only to harden again. The net result? A question mark!

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[1] See S.A. Kendrick, "Minority Students on Campus," in R.A. Altman and P.O. Snyder (eds.), op. cit.

[2] For further ideas on Chicanos and higher education, see Henry J. Casso, "Higher Education and the Mexican American," in Gus Tyler (ed.), Mexican-Americans Tomorrow: Educational and Economic Perspectives. Albuquerque, U. of New Mexico Press, 1975.

If one compares the present situation of the universities in terms of their adequacy to narrow significantly the gap between present reality and the professed ideal of equality in educational opportunities for the Mexican American, one's hope may turn into despair. Do universities recognize that the Chicano community has special needs? Are they willing to modify their structures to serve different clienteles? Will they be allowed to do so by the dominant segments of society? Question marks!